

THE
MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

A
TRAGEDY.

THE
MYSTERIOUS MOTHER

TRAGEDY

T H E
MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

R

A
T R A G E D Y.



L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR J. DODSLEY, PALL-MALL.

M.DCC.LXXXI.

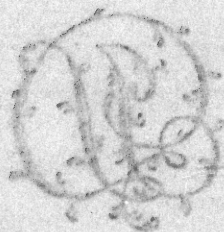
THE

MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

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Y. D. R. T



L O N D O N :

Printed for J. DODSLEY, Pall-Mall.

M.DCC.LXXXII.

the work devoted to it, as expected, is to be believed how
willingly he has submitted to its appearance.

~~He has not been able to avoid the charge of having undertaken to~~
disgrace a story, and for having hazarded

THE Author of the following Tragedy
is so far from thinking it worthy of
being offered to the Public, that he has
done every thing in his power to prevent
the publication—in vain. It is solely to
avoid its being rendered still worse by a
surreptitious edition, that he is reduced to
give it from his own copy. He is sensible
that the subject is disgusting, and by no
means compensated by the execution. It
was written several years ago; and to pre-
vent the trouble of reading it, or having it
transcribed, a few copies were printed and
given away. One or two have been circu-
lated, and different editions have been ad-
vertised, which occasion the present pub-
lication. All the favour the Author soli-
cits

cits or expects, is, to be believed how unwillingly he has submitted to its appearance: he cannot be more blamed than he blames himself for having undertaken so disagreeable a story, and for having hazarded the publicity by letting it go out of his own hands. He respects the judgment of the Public too much to offer to them voluntarily what he does not think deserves their approbation.

APRIL 29, 1781.

PERSONS.

P E R S O N S.

COUNTESS of NARBONNE.

COUNT EDMUND, her Son.

FLORIAN, his Friend.

ADELIZA, an Orphan.

BENEDICT, }
MARTIN, } Friars.

PETER, Porter of the Castle.

MARIA, }
ELINOR, } Damsels attending the Countess. Mutes.

CHORUS of Orphans.

CHORUS of Friars.

*The Scene lies at the Castle of Narbonne; partly on a
Platform before the Gate, partly in a Garden within
the Walls.*

PERSONS

COUNTESS of Harcourt
Count EDMUND, her son
FLORIAN, his friend
ADELIA, an orphan
BENEDICT, a Frenchman
MARTIN
PETER, Porter of the Castle
MARIA
ELINOR, { daughter attending the Countess's Maids
Chorus of Orphans
Chorus of Peasants
The scene lies at the Castle of Harcourt; partly on a
platform before the gate, partly in a garden within
the walls.

THE
MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

A
T R A G E D Y.

A C T the F I R S T.

S C E N E I.

A Platform before the Castle.

FLORIAN.

WHAT awful silence! How these antique
towers

And vacant courts chill the suspended soul,
Till expectation wears the cast of fear,
And fear, half-ready to become devotion,
Mumbles a kind of mental orison,
It knows not wherefore. What a kind of being
Is circumstance!

I am a soldier, and were yonder battlements
Garnish'd with combatants, and cannon-mounted,
My daring breast would bound with exultation,
And glorious hopes enliven this drear scene.

B

Exit

2 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Now dare not I scarce tread to my own hearing,
Lest echo borrow superstition's tongue,
And seem to answer me, like one departed.
I met a peasant, and enquir'd my way :
The carle, not rude of speech, but like the tenant
Of some night-haunted ruin, bore an aspect
Of horror, worn to habitude. He bade
God bless me ; and pass'd on. I urg'd him farther :
Good master, cried he, go not to the castle ;
There sorrow ever dwells, and moping misery.
I press'd him yet—None there, said he, are welcome,
But now and then a mass-priest, and the poor ;
To whom the pious Countess deals her alms,
On covenant, that each revolving night
They beg of heav'n the health of her son's soul
And of her own : but often as returns
The twentieth of September, they are bound
Fast from the midnight watch to pray till morn.—
More would he not disclose, or knew not more.
—What precious mummery ! Her son in exile,
She wastes on monks and beggars his inheritance,
For his soul's health ! I never knew a woman
But lov'd our bodies or our souls too well.
Each master whim maintains its hour of empire,
And obstinately faithful to its dictates,
With equal ardour, equal importunity,
They tease us to be damn'd, or to be sav'd.
I hate to love or pray too long.

SCENE II.

A TRAGEDY. 3

SCENE II.

PORTER of the Castle, FLORIAN:

PORTER.

Methought

I heard a stranger's voice—What lack you, sir?

FLORIAN.

Good fellow, who inhabits here?

PORTER.

I do:

FLORIAN.

Belike this castle is not thine.

PORTER.

Belike so:

But be it whose it may, this is no haunt
For revellers and gallants—pass your way.

FLORIAN.

Thou churl! Is this your Gallic hospitality?
Thy lady, on my life, would not thus rudely
Chide from her presence a bewilder'd knight.

PORTER.

Thou know'st my lady then!—Thou know'st her not.
Canst thou, in hair-cloths vex those dainty limbs?
Canst thou on reeking pavements and cold marble;
In meditation pass the livelong night?
Canst mortify that flesh, my rosy minion,
And bid thy rebel appetite refrain
From goblets foaming wine, and costly viands?
These are the deeds, my youngster, must draw down
My lady's ever-heav'n-directed eye.

B 2

FLORIAN.

4 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

FLORIAN.

In sooth, good friend, my knighthood is not school'd
In voluntary rigours—I can fast,
March supperless, and make cold earth my pillow,
When my companions know no choicer fare.
But seldom roost in churches, or reject
The ready banquet, or a willing fair one.

PORTER.

Angels defend us! what a reprobate!
Yon mould'ring porch for sixteen years and more
Has not been struck with such unhallow'd sounds.
Hence to thy lewd companions!

FLORIAN.

Father greybeard,

I cry you mercy; nor was't my intention
To wound your reverence's faint-like organs.
But come, thou hast known other days—canst tell
Of banquettings and dancings—'twas not always thus.

PORTER.

No, no—time was—my lord, the count of Narbonne,
A prosperous gentleman, were he alive,
We should not know these moping melancholies.
Heav'n rest his soul! I marvel not my lady
Cherishes his remembrance, for he was
Comely to sight, and wond'rous goodly built.
They say his son count Edmund's mainly like him.
Would these old arms, that serv'd his grandfather,
Could once enfold him! I should part in peace.

FLORIAN.

What, if I bring thee tidings of count Edmund!

PORTER.

Mercy befall me! now my dream is out.

Last

A TRAGEDY.

5

Last night the raven croak'd, and from the bars
Of our lodge-fire flitted a messenger—
I knew no good would follow—bring you ill tidings,
Sir gentleman?

FLORIAN.

(This is a solemn fool, [*Aside.*

Or solemn knave.) Shouldst thou indeed rejoice
To see count Edmund? Would thy noble mistress
Spring with a mother's joy to clasp her son?

PORTER.

Oh! no, no, no.—He must not here—alas!
He must not here set foot—But tell me, stranger,
I prithee say, does my old master's heir
Still breathe this vital air? Is he in France?
Is he within some ten, or twenty leagues,
Or fifty? I am hearty yet, have all my limbs,
And I would make a weary pilgrimage
To kiss his gracious hand, and at his feet
Lay my old bones—for here I ne'er must see him.

[*Weeps.*

FLORIAN.

Thou good old man, forgive a soldier's mirth.
But say, why Narbonne's heir from Narbonne's lands
Is banish'd, driven by a ruthless mother?

PORTER.

Ah! sir, 'tis hard indeed—but spare his mother;
Such virtue never dwelt in female form.
Count Edmund—but he was indeed a stripling,
A very lad—it was the trick of youth,
And we have all our sins, or we have had;
Yet still no pardon—Thinkst thou not, my lord,
My late kind master, e'er he knew my lady,
Wist not what woman was?—I warrant him—

B 3

But

6 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

But so—count Edmund being not sixteen,
A lusty youth, his father's very image—
Oh! he has play'd me many a trick—good fir,
Does my young master ever name old Peter?
Well! but I prate—you must forgive my age;
I come to th' point—Her name was Beatrice;
A roguish eye—she ne'er would look on me,
Or we had sav'd full many a woeful day!
Mark you me well?

FLORIAN.

I do.

PORTER.

This Beatrice—

But hark! my lady comes—retire a while
Beyond those yews—anon I'll tell you more,

FLORIAN.

May I not greet her?

PORTER.

For my office, no:

'Twere forfeit of my badge to hold a parley
With one of near thy years. [FLORIAN *withdraws*.

[*The COUNTESS in weeds, with a crucifix in her hand, issues from the castle, accompanied by two maidens, and passes over the stage. When she is gone FLORIAN returns.*]

'Tis ever thus.

At break of morn she hies to yonder abbey,
And prostrate o'er some monumental stone,
Seems more to wait her doom, than ask to shun it.
The day is pass'd in ministring to wants
Of health or means; the closing eve beholds
New tears, new pray'rs, or haggard meditation.
But if cold moonshine, deep'ning ev'ry frown

Of

A TRAGEDY. 7

Of these impending towers, invite her steps,
 She issues forth.—Beshrew me, but I tremble,
 When my own keys discharge the drawbridge chains,
 And rattle thro' the castle's farthest vaults.
 Then have I seen this sad, this sober mourner,
 With frantic gesture and disorder'd step—
 But hush—who moves up yonder avenue?
 It is—no—stay—if faith! but it is he,
 My lady's confessor, with friar Martin—
 Quick hie thee hence—should that same meddling monk
 Observe our conf'rence, there were fine work toward.

FLORIAN.

You will not leave your tale unfinished?

PORTER.

Mafs! but I will—a tale will pay no stipend.
 These fifty winters have I borne this staff,
 And will not lose my porridge for my prating.

FLORIAN.

Well! but count Edmund—wo't not hear of him?

PORTER.

Aye, bless his name! at any leisure hour.
 This ev'ning, e'er the shutting of the gates,
 Loiter about yon grange; I'll come to thee.
 So now, begone—away. *[Exeunt severally.]*

SCENE III.

BENEDICT, MARTIN.

BENEDICT.

Ay! sift her, sift her—
 As if I had not prob'd her very soul,
 And wound me round her heart—I tell thee, brother,

B 4

This

8 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

This woman was not cast in human mould.
 Ten such would foil a council, would unbuild
 Our Roman church—In her devotion's real.
 Our beads, our hymns, our saints, amuse her not :
 Nay, not confession, not repeating o'er
 Her darling sins, has any charms for her.
 I have mark'd her praying : not one wand'ring thought
 Seems to steal meaning from her words.—She prays
 Because she feels, and feels, because a sinner.

MARTIN.

What is this secret sin ; this untold tale,
 That art cannot extract, nor penance cleanse ?
 Loss of a husband, sixteen years enjoy'd,
 And dead as many, could not stamp such sorrow.
 Nor could she be his death's artificer,
 And now affect to weep it—I have heard,
 That chafing, as he homeward rode, a stag,
 Chaf'd by the hounds, with sudden onset slew
 Th' adventurous count.

BENEDICT.

'Twas so ; and yet, my brother,
 My mind has more than once imputed blood
 To this incessant mourner. Beatrice,
 The damsel for whose sake she holds in exile
 Her only son, has never, since the night
 Of his incontinence, been seen or heard of.

MARTIN.

'Tis clear, 'tis clear ; nor will her prudent tongue
 Accuse its owner.

BENEDICT.

Judge not rashly, brother.
 I oft have shifted my discourse to murder :
 She notes it not. Her faculties hold their place,

Nor

A TRAGEDY.

Nor discompos'd, nor firm'd to steadiness.
No sudden flushing, and no falt'ring lip:
Nor, tho' she pities, lifts she to her eyes
Her handkerchief, to palliate her disorder.
There the wound rankles not.—I fix'd on love,
The failure of the sex, and aptest cause
Of each attendant crime—

MARTIN.

Ay, brother, there
We master all their craft. Touch but that string—

BENEDICT.

Still, brother, do you err. She own'd to me,
That, tho' of nature warm, the passion love
Did ne'er anticipate her choice. The count,
Her husband, so ador'd and so lamented,
Won not her fancy, till the nuptial rites
Had with the sting of pleasure taught her passion,
This, with such modest truth, and that truth heighten'd
By conscious sense, that holds deceit a weakness,
She utter'd, I would pawn my order's credit
On her veracity.

MARTIN.

Then whither turn
To worm her secret out?

BENEDICT.

I know not that.
She will be silent, but she scorns a falsehood.
And thus while frank on all things, but her secret,
I know, I know it not.

MARTIN.

Till she disclose it,
Deny her absolution.

BENEDICT.

10 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER,

BENEDICT.

She will take none :

Offer'd, she scoffs it ; and withheld, demands not.

Nay, vows she will not load her sinking soul

With incantations.

MARTIN.

This is heresy ;

Rank heresy ; and holy church should note it.

BENEDICT.

Be patient, brother—Tho' of adamant

Her reason, charity dissolves that rock,

—And surely we have tasted of the stream.

Nay, one unguarded moment may disclose

This mystic tale—then, brother, what a harvest,

When masters of her bosom-guilt !—Age too

May numb her faculties.—Or soon, or late,

A praying woman must become our spoil.

MARTIN.

Her zeal may falter.

BENEDICT.

Not in solitude.

I nurse her in new horrors ; form her tenants

To fancy visions, phantoms ; and report them.

She mocks their fond credulity—but trust me,

Her memory retains the colouring.

Oft times it paints her dreams ; and ebon night

Is no logician. I have known her call

For lights, e'er she could combat its impressions.

I too, tho' often scorn'd, relate my dreams,

And wond'rous voices heard ; that she may think me

At least an honest bigot ; nor remember

I tried to practice on her fears, and foil'd,

Give o'er my purpose.

MARTIN.

A TRAGEDY.

11

MARTIN.

This is masterly.

BENEDICT.

Poor mastery ! when I am more in awe
Of my own penitent, than she of me.
My genius is command ; art, but a tool
My groveling fortune forces me to use.
Oh ! were I seated high as my ambition,
I'd place this naked foot on necks of monarchs,
And make them bow to creeds myself would laugh at*,

MARTIN.

By humbler arts our mighty fabric rose.
Win pow'r by craft ; wear it with ostentation ;
For confidence is half-security.
Deluded men think boldness, conscious strength ;
And grow the slaves of their own want of doubt.
Gain to the holy see this fair domain ;
A crimson bonnet may reward your toils,
And the rich harvest prove at last your own.

BENEDICT.

Never, while Edmund lives. This steady woman
Can ne'er be pious with so many virtues.
Justice is interwoven in her frame ;
Nor will she wrong the son she will not see.
She loves him not ; yet mistress of his fortunes,
His ample exhibition speaks her bounty.
She destines him whate'er his father's love
Gave blindly to her will. Her alms, her charities,
Usurp'd from her own wants, she sets apart
A scanty portion only for her ward,
Young Adeliza,

* Alluding to Sixtus quintus.

MARTIN.

12 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER,

MARTIN.

Say her son were dead,
And Adeliza veil'd—

BENEDICT.

I press the latter
With fruitless ardour. Often as I urge it,
She pleads the maiden's flushing cheek, and nature,
That speaks in characters of glowing rose
Its modest appetites and timid wishes.
Her sex, she says, when gratified, are frail;
When check'd, a hurricane of boundless passions.
Then, with sweet irony and sad, she wills me
Ask my own breast, if cowls and scapularies
Are charms all powerful to subdue desire?

MARTIN.

'Twere wiser school the maiden: lead the train
Of young ideas to a fancied object.
A mental spouse may fill her hov'ring thoughts,
And bar their fixing on some earthly lover.

BENEDICT.

This is already done—but Edmund's death
Were hopes more solid—

MARTIN.

First report him dead,
His letters intercepted—

BENEDICT.

Greatly thought!
Thou true son of the church!—and lo! where comes
Our patroness—leave me; I will not lose
An instant. I will sound her inmost soul,
And mould it to the moment of projection.

[Exit MARTIN.

[BENEDICT retires within the castle.

SCENE

S C E N E IV.

COUNTESS, TWO MAIDENS.

COUNTESS.

Haste thee, Maria, to the western tower,
 And learn if th' aged pilgrim dozes yet.
 You, Elinor, attend my little orphans,
 And when their task is done, prepare their breakfast.
 But scant th' allowance of the red-hair'd urchin,
 That maim'd the poor man's cur—Ah! happy me!

[The damsels go in.]

If sentiment, untutor'd by affliction,
 Had taught my temperate blood to feel for others,
 E'er pity, perching on my mangled bosom,
 Like flies on wounded flesh, had made me shrink
 More with compunction than with sympathy!
 Alas! must guilt then ground our very virtues!
 Grow they on sin alone, and not on grace?
 While Narbonne liv'd, my fully-fated soul
 Thought none unhappy—for it did not think!
 In pleasures roll'd whole summer-suns away;
 And if a pensive visage cross'd my path,
 I deem'd the wearer envious or ill-natur'd.
 What anguish had I blessedly redress'd,
 But that I was too bless'd!—Well! peace is fled,
 Ne'er to return! nor dare I snap the thread
 Of life, while misery may want a friend.
 Despair and hell must wait, while pity needs
 My ministry—Eternity has scope
 Enough to punish me, tho' I should borrow
 A few short hours to sacrifice to charity.

S C E N E

14 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

S C E N E V.

BENEDICT, COUNTESS.

BENEDICT.

I fought you, lady.

COUNTESS.

Happily I'm found.

Who needs the widow's mite?

BENEDICT.

None ask your aid.

Your gracious foresight still prevents occasion:

And your poor beadsman joys to meet your presence;

Uncumber'd with a suit. It pains my soul,

Oft as I tax your bounty, lest I seem

A craving or immodest almoner.

COUNTESS.

No more of this, good father. I suspect not

One of your holy order of dissembling:

Suspect not me of loving flattery.

Pass a few years, and I shall be a corpse—

Will flattery then new cloath my skeleton,

Fill out these hollow jaws? Will't give me virtues?

Or at the solemn audit pass for truth,

And varnish o'er my stains?

BENEDICT.

The church could seal

Your pardon—but you scorn it. In your pride

Consists your danger. Your's are Pagan virtues:

As such I praise them—but as such, condemn them.

COUNTESS.

A TRAGEDY. ACT 35

COUNTESS.

Father, my *crimes* are Pagan ; my belief
Too orthodox to trust to erring man.
What ! shall I, foul with guilt, and self-condemn'd,
Presume to kneel, where angels kneel appal'd,
And plead a priest's certificate for pardon ?
While he, perchance, before my blasted eyes
Shall sink to woes, endless, unutterable,
For having fool'd me into that presumption.

BENEDICT.

Is he to blame, trusting to what he grants ?

COUNTESS.

Am I to blame, not trusting what he grants ?

BENEDICT.

Yet faith—

COUNTESS.

I have it not—Why shakes my soul
With nightly terrors ? Courage such as mine
Would start at nought but guilt. 'Tis from within
I tremble. Death would be felicity,
Were there no retrospect. What joys have I ?
What pleasure softens, or what friendship soothes
My aching bosom ?—I have lost my husband :
My own decree has banish'd my own son.

BENEDICT.

Last night I dreamt your son was with the blessed.

COUNTESS.

Would heav'n he were !

BENEDICT.

Do you then wish his death ?

COUNTESS.

Should I not wish him blest ?

BENEDICT.

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BENEDICT.

Belike he is :

I never knew my Friday's dreams erroneous.

COUNTESS.

Nor I knew superstition in the right.

BENEDICT.

Madam, I must no longer hear this language.

You do abuse my patience. I have borne,

For your soul's health, and hoping your conversion,

Opinions most deprav'd. It ill beseems

My holy function to give countenance,

By lending ear, to such pernicious tenets.

The judgments hanging o'er your destin'd head

May reach ev'n me—I see it ! I am wrapt

Beyond my bearing ! my prophetic soul

Views the red falchion of eternal justice

Cut off your sentenc'd race—your son is dead !

COUNTESS.

Father, we no prophetic dæmon bear

Within our breast, but conscience. *That* has spoken

Words more tremendous than this acted zeal,

This poetry of fond enthusiasm

Can conjure up. It is the still small voice

That breathes conviction. 'Tis that voice has told me,

'Twas my son's birth, not his mortality, *

Must drown my soul in woe.—Those tears are shed.

BENEDICT.

Unjust, uncharitable as your words,

* On the death of the comte de Vermandois, his mother, the duchess de la Valiere, said, Must I weep for his death before I have done weeping for his birth ?

I pardon

I pardon them. Illy of me you deem;
 I know it, lady. 'Tis humiliation :
 As such I bow to it—yet dear I tender
 Your peace of mind. Dismiss your worthless servant :
 His pray'rs shall still be yours.

COUNTESS.

Forgive me, father :
 Discretion does not guide my words. I meant
 No insult on your holy character.

BENEDICT.

No, lady ; chuse some other monitor,
 Whose virtues may command your estimation.
 Your useless beadsman shall behold with joy
 A worthier man mediate your peace with heav'n,

COUNTESS.

Alas ! till reconcil'd with my own breast
 What peace is there for me !

BENEDICT.

In th' neighb'ring district
 There lives a holy man, whose sanctity
 Is mark'd with wond'rous gifts. Grace smiles upon him ;
 Conversion tracks his footsteps : miracles
 Spring from his touch ; his sacred casuistry
 Pours balm into despair. Consult with him.
 Unfold th' impenetrable mystery,
 That sets your soul and you at endless discord.

COUNTESS.

Consult a holy man ! Inquire of him !
 —Good father, wherefore ? What should I inquire ?
 Must I be taught of him, that guilt is woe ?

* Imitated from Cato's speech in Lucan, beginning, *Quid quaeri, Labiane, jubeas ?*

18 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

That innocence alone is happiness ?
 That martyrdom itself shall leave the villain
 The villain that it found him ? Must I learn
 That minutes stamp'd with crimes are past recall ?
 That joys are momentary ; and remorse
 Eternal ? Shall he teach me charms and spells,
 To make my sense believe against my sense ?
 Shall I think practices and penances
 Will, if he say so, give the health of virtue
 To gnawing self-reproach ?—I know they cannot.
 Nor could one risen from the dead proclaim
 This truth in deeper sounds to my conviction.
 We want no preacher to distinguish vice
 From virtue. At our birth the god reveal'd
 All conscience needs to know. No codicil
 To duty's rubric here and there was plac'd
 In some saint's casual custody. Weak minds
 Want their soul's fortune told by oracles
 And holy juglers. Me, nor oracles,
 Nor prophets, death alone can certify,
 Whether, when justice's full dues exacted,
 Mercy shall grant one drop to slake my torment.
 —Here, father, break we off ; you to your calling ;
 I to my tears and mournful occupation.

End of the First Act.

ACT

A C T the S E C O N D.

The SCENE continues.

Count EDMUND, FLORIAN.

EDMUND.

DOUBT not, my friend ; Time's pencil, hardships,
war,

Some taste of pleasure too, have chas'd the bloom
Of ruddy comeliness, and stamp'd this face
With harsher lineaments, that well may mock
The prying of a mother's eye.—A mother,
Thro' whose firm nerves tumultuous instinct's flood
Ne'er gush'd with eager eloquence, to tell her,
This is your son ! your heart's own voice proclaims him.

FLORIAN.

If not her love, my lord, suspect her hatred.
Those jarring passions spring from the same source :
Hate is distemper'd love.

EDMUND.

Why should she hate me ?

For that my opening passion's swelling ardour
Prompted congenial necessary joy,
Was that a cause ?—Nor was she then so rigid.
No sanctified dissembler had possess'd
Her scar'd imagination, teaching her,
That holiness begins where nature ends.
No, Florian, she herself was woman then ;
A sensual woman. Nor satiety,
Sickness and age, and virtue's frowardness,

20 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Had so obliterated pleasure's relish—
She might have pardon'd what she felt so well.

FLORIAN.

Forgive me, Edmund; nay, nor think I preach,
If I, god wot, of morals loose enough,
Seem to condemn you. You have often told me,
The night, the very night that to your arms
Gave pretty Beatrice's melting beauties,
Was the same night on which your father died.

EDMUND.

'Tis true—and thou, sage monitor, dost thou
Hold love a crime so irremissible?
Wouldst thou have turn'd thee from a willing girl,
To sing a requiem to thy father's soul?
I thought my mother busied with her tears,
Her faintings, and her masses, while I stole
To Beatrice's chamber.—How my mother
Became appriz'd, I know not: but her heart,
Never too partial to me, grew estrang'd.
Estrang'd!—aversion in its fellest mood
Scowl'd from her eye, and drove me from her sight.
She call'd me impious: nam'd my honest lewdness,
A profanation of my father's ashes.
I knelt and wept, and, like a puling boy,
For now my blood was cool, believ'd, confess'd
My father's hov'ring spirit incens'd against me.
This weak confession but inflam'd her wrath;
And when I would have bath'd her hand with tears,
She snatch'd it back with horror.

FLORIAN.

'Twas the trick
Of over-acted sorrow. Grief fatigues;
And each collateral circumstance is seiz'd

To

To cheat th' uneasy feeling. Sable chambers,
 The winking lamp, and pomp of midnight woe,
 Are but a specious theatre, on which
 Th' inconstant mind with decency forgets
 Its inward tribute. Who can doubt the love
 Which to a father's shade devotes the son? [*Ironically.*]

EDMUND.

Still must I doubt : still deem some mystery,
 Beyond a widow's pious artifice,
 Lies hid beneath aversion so relentless.
 All my inheritance, my lordships, castles,
 My father's lavish love bequeath'd my mother.
 Chose she some second partner of her bed,
 Or did she waste her wealth on begging saints,
 And rogues that act contrition, it were proof
 Of her hypocrisy, or lust of fame
 In monkish annals. But to me her hand
 Is bounteous, as her heart is cold. I tell thee,
 Bating enjoyment of my native soil,
 Narbonne's revenues are as fully mine,
 As if I held them by the strength of charters.

FLORIAN.

Why set them on the hazard then, when she,
 Who deals them may revoke? Your absence hence
 The sole condition.

EDMUND.

I am weary, Florian,
 Of such a vagrant life. Befits it me,
 Sprung from a race of heroes, Narbonne's prince,
 To lend my casual arm's approved valour
 To quarrels, nor my country's nor my own?
 To stain my sword with random blood!—I fought
 At Buda 'gainst the Turk—a holy war,

22 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

So was it deem'd—I smote the turban'd race :
 Did zeal or did ambition nerve my blow ?
 Or matter'd it to me, on Buda's domes
 Whether the crescent or the cross prevail'd ?
 Mean time on alien climes I dissipated
 Wealth from my subjects wrung, the peasant's tribute,
 Earn'd by his toil. Mean time in ruin laid
 My mould'ring castles—Yes, ye moss-grown walls !
 Ye tow'rs defenceless !—I revisit ye
 Shame-stricken.—Where are all your trophies now ?
 Your thronged courts, the revelry, the tumult,
 That spoke the grandeur of my house, the homage
 Of neighb'ring barons ? Thus did Thibalt, Raoul,
 Or Clodomir, my brave progenitors,
 Creep like a spy, and watch to thrid your gates
 Unnotic'd ? No ; with martial attributes,
 With waving banners and enlivening fifes,
 They bade your portal wide unfold its jaws,
 And welcome them and triumph.

FLORIAN.

True, my lord :
 They reign'd the monarchs of a score of miles ;
 Imperial lords of ev'ry trembling cottage
 Within their cannon's mandate. Deadly feuds
 For obsolete offences, now array'd
 Their livery'd banditti, prompt to deal
 On open vallies and unguarded herds,
 On helpless virgins and unweapon'd boors,
 The vengeance of their tribe. Sometimes they dar'd
 To scowl defiance to the distant throne,
 Imprison'd, canton'd inaccessiblely
 In their own rock-built dungeons—Are these glories
 My

My Edmund's soul's ambitious to revive?
Thus would he bless his vassals!

EDMUND.

Thy reproof,

My friend, is just. But had I not a cause,
A tender cause, that prompted my return?
This cruel parent, whom I blame, and mourn,
Whose harshness I resent, whose woes I pity,
Has won my love, by winning my respect.
Her letters! Florian; such unstudied strains
Of virtuous eloquence! She bids me, yes,
This praying Magdalen enjoins my courage
To emulate my great forefathers' deeds.
Tells me, that shame and guilt alone are mortal;
That death but bars the possibility
Of frailty, and embalms untainted honour.
Then blots and tears efface some half-told woe
Lab'ring in her full bosom. I decypher'd
In one her blessing granted, and eras'd.
And yet what follow'd, mark'd anxiety
For my soul's welfare. I must know this riddle.
I must, will comfort her. She cannot surely,
After such perils, wounds by her command
Encounter'd, after sixteen exil'd years,
Spurn me, when kneeling—Think'st thou 'tis possible?

FLORIAN.

I would not think it; but a host of priests
Surround her. They, good men, are seldom found
To plead the cause of pity. Self-denial,
Whose dissonance from nature's kindest laws
By contradicting wins on our perverseness,
Is rank fanaticism's belov'd machine.
Oh! 'twill be heroism, a sacrifice,

C 4

To

24 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

To curb the torrent of maternal fondness !
You shall be beggar'd, that the saint your mother
May, by cowl'd sycophants and canting juglers,
Be hail'd, be canoniz'd a new Teresa.
Pray be not seen here : let's again to th' wars.

EDMUND.

No, Florian ; my dull'd soul is sick of riot :
Sick of the thoughtless jollity of camps,
Where revelry subsists on desolation,
And shouts of joy contend with dying groans.
Our sports are fleeting ; snatch'd, perhaps, not granted.
'Tis time to bid adieu to vagrant pleasure,
And fix the wanderer love. Domestic bliss—

FLORIAN.

Yes, your fair pensioner, young Adeliza,
Has sober'd your inconstancy. Her smiles
Were exquisite—to rule a family ! *[Ironically.]*
So matron-like an air—She must be fruitful.

EDMUND.

Pass we this levity—'Tis true, the maiden
Is beauty's type renew'd. Like blooming Eve
In nature's young simplicity, and blushing
With wonder at creation's opening glow,
She charms, unknowing what it is to charm.

FLORIAN.

This is a lover's language—Is she kind ?

EDMUND.

Cold as the metal bars that part her from me ;
She listens, but replies not to my purpose.

FLORIAN.

How gain'd you then admittance ?

EDMUND.

This whole month,
While

A TRAGEDY.

25

While waiting your arrival, I have haunted
Her convent's parlour. 'Tis my mother's wish
To match her nobly. Hence her guardian abbess
Admits such visitors as claim her notice
By worthy bearing, and convenient splendor.
O Florian, union with that favour'd maiden
Might reconcile my mother—Hark! what sound—
[*A chapel bell rings.*]

FLORIAN.

A summons to some office of devotion.
My lord, weigh well what you project—
[*Singing within.*]

EDMUND.

I hear
Voices that seem approaching—hush! they sing.
Listen!

FLORIAN.

No; let us hence: you will be known.

EDMUND.

They cannot know me—see!

S C E N E II.

FLORIAN, EDMUND, MARTIN, ORPHANS.

[*A procession of children of both sexes, neatly cloathed in a white and blue uniform, issue from the castle, followed by friar MARTIN, and advance towards the stage door. They stop, and the children repeat the following hymn, part of which they should have sung within the castle.*]

I.

Throne of justice! lo! we bend.
Thither dare our hopes ascend,

Where

26 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Where seraphs, wrapt in light'ning rays,
Dissolve in mercy's tender blaze.

II.

Hear us! harmless orphans hear!
For her who dries our falling tear.
Hush her sorrows; calm her breast:
Give her, what she gives us, rest.

III.

Guard our spotless souls from sin!
Grant us virtue's palm to win!
Cloath the penitent with grace;
And guilt's foul spots efface! efface!

EDMUND.

I'll speak to them.

Sweet children—or thou sanctified conductor,
Give me to know what solemn pilgrimage,
What expiation of offences past,
Thus sadly ye perform? In whose behoof
To win a blessing, raise these little suppliants
Their artless hands to heav'n? Pray pardon too
A soldier's curiosity.

MARTIN.

The dew

Of grace and peace attend your steps. You seem
A stranger, or you could but know, sir knight,
That Narbonne's pious countess dwells within:
A lady most disconsolate. Her lord,
Her best-beloved, by untimely fate
Was snatch'd away in lusty life's full 'vantage—
But no account made up! no absolution!
Hence scant the distance of a mile he fell.
His weeping relict o'er his spot of doom

A goodly

A goodly cross erected. Thither we,
At his year's mind, in sad and solemn guise,
Proceed to chant our holy dirge, and offer
Due intercession for his soul's repose.

EDMUND.

'Tis fitly done. And dar'd a voice profane
Join in the chorus of your holy office,
Myself would kneel for Narbonne's peace.

MARTIN.

Young sir,
It glads my soul to hear such pious breathings
From one, whose occupation rarely scans
The distance 'twixt enjoyment and the tomb.
Say, didst thou know the count?

EDMUND.

I knew his son.

MARTIN.

Count Edmund? Where sojourns he?

EDMUND.

In the grave.

MARTIN.

Is Edmund dead? Say, how?

EDMUND.

He fell at Buda:

And not to his dishonour.

MARTIN.

(Welcome sounds! [*Aside.*

I must know more of this)—Proceed, my children;
Short of the cross I'll overtake your steps.

ORPHAN GIRL.

Oh! father, but I dare not pass without you
By the church-porch. They say the count sits there,
With

28 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

With clotted locks, and eyes like burning stars.

Indeed I dare not go.

Other CHILDREN.

Nor I. Nor I.

MARTIN.

My loves, he will not harm such innocents.

But wait me at the bridge: I'll strait be with ye.

[Children go out reluctantly.]

FLORIAN.

I marvel, father, gravity like yours

Should yield assent to tales of such complexion;

Permitting them in baby fantasy

To strike their dangerous root.

MARTIN.

I marvel not,

That levity like yours, unhallow'd boy,

Should spend its idle shaft on serious things.

Your comrade's bearing warrants no such licence.

FLORIAN.

Think'st thou, because my friend with humble fervour

Kneels to Omnipotence, each gossip's dream,

Each village-fable domineers in turn

His brain's distemper'd nerves? Think'st thou a soldier

Must by his calling be an impious braggart?

Or being not, a superstitious slave?

True valour, owning no preheminance

In equals, dares not wag presumption's tongue

Against high heav'n.

MARTIN.

In us respect heav'n's servants.

FLORIAN.

Monks may reach heav'n, but never came from thence.

[Violent storm of thunder and lightening.]

MARTIN.

MARTIN.

Will this convince thee! Where's the gossip's dream?
The village-fable now? Hear heav'n's own voice
Condemn impiety!

FLORIAN.

Hear heav'n's own voice
Condemn imposture!

EDMUND.

Here end your dispute.
The storm comes on.

MARTIN.

Yes, you do well to check
Your comrade's profanation, lest swift justice
O'ertake his guilt, and stamp his doom in thunder.

FLORIAN.

Father, art thou so read in languages
Thou canst interpret th' inarticulate
And quarreling elements? What says the storm?
Pronounces it for thee or me? Do none
Dispute within the compass of its bolt
But we? Is the same loud-voic'd oracle
Definitive for fifty various brawls?
Or but a shock of clouds to all but us?
"What if two drunkards at this instant hour
Contend for preference of taste, one ranking
The vines of Burgundy before the juice
That dances in a foam of brilliant bubbles
From Champagne's berries, think'st thou thunder
speaks
"In favour of the white or ruby grape?"

MARTIN.

What mockery! I resign thee to thy fate— [Going.
[The

30 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

[*The ORPHAN-CHILDREN run in terrified.*]

First ORPHAN.

O father, save us ! save us ! holy father.

MARTIN.

What means this panic ?

First ORPHAN.

Oh ! a storm so dreadful !

Some demon rides in th' air.

MARTIN.

Undoubtedly.

Could ye distinguish ought ?

First ORPHAN.

I fell to earth,

And said the pray'r you taught me against spectres.

MARTIN.

'Twas well—but none of you, had none the courage
To face the fiend ?

Second ORPHAN.

I wink'd, and saw the light'ning

Burst on the monument. The shield of arms

Shiver'd to splinters. E'er I could repeat

An Ave-Mary, down with hideous crash

The cross came tumbling—then I fled—

MARTIN.

Retire ;

This is unholy ground. Acquaint the Countess.

I will not tarry long. [*Ex. children.*] Thou mouth ac-
curst,

[*To FLORIAN.*

Repent, and tremble ! Wherefore hast thou drawn

On Narbonne's plains, already visited

By long calamity, new storms of horror ?

The seasons change their course ; th' afflicted hind

Bewails his blasted harvest. Meteors ride

The

The troubled sky, and chase the darken'd sun,
 Heav'n vindicates its altars : tongues licentious
 Have scoff'd our holy rites, and hidden sins
 Have forc'd th' offended elements to borrow
 Tremendous organs ! Sixteen fatal years
 Has Narbonne's province groan'd beneath the hand
 Of desolation—for what crimes we know not !
 To edge suspended vengeance art thou come ?

EDMUND, *preventing* FLORIAN.

My friend, reply not—Father, I lament
 This casual jarring—let us crave your pardon.
 I feel your country's woes : I lov'd count Edmund :
 Revere his father's ashes. I will visit
 The ruin'd monument—and at your leisure
 Could wish some conf'rence with you.

MARTIN.

(This is well : [*Aside*.

I almost had forgotten)—Be it so.

Where is your haunt ?

EDMUND.

A mile without the town :

Hard by St. Bridget's nunnery.

MARTIN.

There expect me.

Aside.] (I must to Benedict)—Heav'n's peace be with
 you. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

COUNTESS, PORTER.

PORTER.

Return, my gracious lady. Tho' the storm

32 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Abates its clamours, yonder angry clouds
Are big with spouting fires—do not go forth.

COUNTESS.

Wretches like me, good Peter, dread no storms.
'Tis delicate felicity that shrinks,
When rocking winds are loud, and wraps itself
Insultingly in comfortable furs,
Thinking how many naked objects want
Like shelter and security. Do thou
Return; I'll seek the monument alone.

PORTER.

No, my good lady; never be it said
That faithful Peter his dear mistress left
Expos'd to tempests. These thin-sprinkled hairs
Cannot hold long. If in your service shed,
'Twere a just debt—hark! sure I heard a groan!
Pray let us in again—

COUNTESS.

My honest servant,
Thy fear o'er-pow'rs thy love. I heard no groan;
Nor could it 'scape a sense so quick as mine
At catching misery's expressive note:
'Tis my soul's proper language.—Injur'd shade!
Shade of my Narbonne! if thy scornful spirit
Rode in yon whirlwind, and impell'd its bolt
Implacable! indignant! 'gainst the cross
Rais'd by thy wretched wife—behold she comes
A voluntary victim! Re-assemble
Thy light'nings, and accept her destin'd head.

PORTER.

For pity! gracious dame what words are these!
In any mouth less holy they would seem
A magic incantation. Goblins rise

At

At sounds less pow'rful. Last year's 'clipse fell out,
Because your maidens cross'd a gipsy's palm
To know what was become of Beatrice.

COUNTESS.

And didst thou dare inform them where she dwells?

PORTER.

No, on my duty—true; they think I know;
And so thinks Benedict, your confessor.
He says, she could not pass the castle-gates
Without my privity—Well! I had a task
To say him nay. The honour of my keys,
My office was at stake. No, father, said I,
None pass the drawbridge without Peter's knowledge.
How then to beat him from his point?—I had it—
Who knows, quoth I, but sudden malady
Took off the damsel? She might, or might not
Have sepulture within the castle-walls—

COUNTESS.

Peace, fool—and thus thy shrewd equivocation
Has stain'd my name with murder's foul suspicion!
—O peace of virtue! thy true votaries
Quail not with ev'ry blast! I cloak my guilt!
Things foreign rise and load me with their blackness.
Erroneous imputation must be borne;
Left, while unravelling the knotty web,
I lend a clue may vibrate to my heart.
—But who comes here?—retire we and observe.

[They withdraw.]

SCENE IV.

FLORIAN, COUNTESS, PORTER.

FLORIAN.

'Tis not far off the time the porter will'd me
Expect him here. My friend, indulging grief,

D

Chose

34 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Chose no companion of his pensive walk.
Yes, I must serve thee. May my prosp'rous care
Restore thee to thy state, and aid thy love
To make the blooming Adeliza thine !

COUNTESS, *apart to the PORTER.*
Methought he spoke of love and Adeliza.
Who may it be ?

PORTER.

I never heard his name.

COUNTESS, *approaching.*
Stranger, did chance or purpose guide thy steps
To this lone dwelling ?

[PORTER *makes signs to FLORIAN not to discover
their former interview.*

FLORIAN.

Pardon, gentle lady,
If curious to behold the pious matron
Whom Narbonne's plains obey, I sought this castle,
And deem my wish indulg'd in viewing thee.

COUNTESS.

Me ! stranger. Is affliction then so rare
It occupies the babbling Fame ?—Oh ! no.
My sorrows are not new. Austerities
And rigid penance tempt no curious eyes.
Nor speaks your air desire of searching out
The house of mourning. Rather should you seek
Some unsunn'd beauty, some unpractic'd fair one,
Who thinks the first soft sounds she hears, are love.
There may be such at Narbonne : none dwell here,
But melancholy, sorrow, and contrition.

FLORIAN.

Pleasure has charms ; but so has virtue too.

One skims the surface, like the swallow's wing,
And scuds away unnotic'd. T'other nymph,
Like spotless swans in solemn majesty,
Breasts the full surge, and leaves long light behind.

COUNTESS.

Your courtly phrase, young knight, bespeaks a birth
Above the vulgar. May I ask, how old
Your residence in Narbonne? Whence your race?

FLORIAN.

In Brabant was I born: my father's name,
The baron of St. Orme. I wait at Narbonne
My letters of exchange, while passing homewards
To gather my late sire's no mean succession.

COUNTESS.

Dead is your father! and unwet your cheek!
Trust me, young sir, a father's guardian arm
Were well worth all the treasures it withheld.
A mother might be spar'd.

FLORIAN.

Mothers, like thee,
Were blessings.

COUNTESS.

Curse!

PORTER.

Lady, 'tis the hour
Of pray'r. Shall I ring out the chapel-bell?

COUNTESS.

Stranger, I'm summon'd hence. Within these walls
I may not speak with thee: my solemn purpose
Admits no converse with unsteady youth.

But at St. Bridget's nunnery, to-morrow,
If you can spare some moments from your pastime,
In presence of the abbess, I would talk with thee.

D 2

FLORIAN.

36 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

FLORIAN.

Madam, I shall not fail.

COUNTESS.

Good angels guard thee!

[*Exit* COUNTESS and PORTER.]

S C E N E V.

FLORIAN, *alone*.

So, this is well. My introduction made,
It follows that I move her for her son.
She seems of gentler mould than fame bespoke her.
Nor wears her eye the saucy superiority
Of bigot pride. Who knows but she may wish
To shake the trammels of enthusiasm off,
And reconcile herself to easier paths
Of simple goodness? Women oft wear the mask
Of piety to draw respect, or hide
The loss of it. When age dispels the train
That waits on beauty, then religion blows
Her trumpet, and invites another circle;
Who full as false as the preceding crew,
Flatter her problematic mental charms:
While snuffing incense, and devoutly wanton,
The Pagan goddess grows a Christian saint,
And keeps her patent of divinity.
Well! Edmund, whatsoe'er thy mother be,
I'll put her virtue or hypocrisy
To the severest test.—Countess, expect me! [*Exit*.]

End of the Second Act.

ACT

ACT the THIRD.

SCENE I.

A small Garden within the Castle, terminated by a long Cloyster, beyond which appear some Towers.

COUNTESS, *alone.*

THE monument destroy'd!—Well! what of that!
 Were ev'ry thunderbolt address'd to me,
 Not one would miss me. Fate's unerring hand
 Darts not at random. Nor, as fractious children
 Are chid by proxy, does it deal its wrath
 On stocks and stones to frighten, not chastise us.
 Omens and prodigies are but begotten
 By guilt on pride. We know the doom we merit;
 And self-importance makes us think all nature
 Busied to warn us when that doom approaches.
 Fie! fie! I blush to recollect my weakness.
 My Edmund may be dead: the house of Narbonne
 May perish from this earth: poor Adeliza
 May taste the cup of woe that I have drug'd:
 But light'nings play not to announce our fate:
 No whirlwinds rise to prophecy to mites:
 Nor, like inquisitors, does heav'n dress up
 In flames the victims it intends to punish;
 Making a holiday for greater sinners.
 —Greater! oh! impious! Were the faggots plac'd
 Around me, and the fatal torch applied,
 What wretch could view the dreadful apparatus,
 And be a blacker criminal than I am?
 —Perhaps my virtues but enhance my guilt.

38 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Penance attracts respect, and not reproach.

How dare I be esteem'd? Be known my crimes!

Let shame anticipate the woes to come!

—Hah! monster! wouldst disclose the frightful scene?

Wouldst teach the vicious world unheard-of sins,

And be a new apostle of perdition?

—My Edmund too! has not a mother's hand

Afflicted him enough? Shall this curs'd tongue

Brand him with shame indelible, and sting

His honest bosom with his mother's scorpions?

Shall Adeliza hear the last of horrors,

E'er her pure breast, that sighs for sins it knows not,

Has learn'd the rudiments of human frailty?

No, hapless maid—

Enter a SERVANT.

Madam, young Adeliza

Intreats to speak with you. The lady abbess

Sickens to death.

COUNTESS.

Admit her.—Now, my soul,

[Ex. Servant.]

Recall thy calm; support alone thy torments;

And envy not the peace thou ne'er must know.

SCENE II.

COUNTESS, ADELIZA.

COUNTESS.

Approach, sweet maid. Thy melancholy mien

Speaks thy compassionate and feeling heart.

'Tis a grave lesson for thy blooming years,

A scene of dissolution! But when Death

Expands

Expands his pinions o'er a bed so holy,
Sure he's a welcome guest.

ADELIZA.

Oh! do not doubt it,
The pious matron meets him like a friend
Expected long. And if a tender tear,
At leaving your poor ward, melts in her eye,
And downward sinks its fervent ecstasy;
Still does impatience to be gone, betray
Her inward satisfaction. Yesternight,
As weeping, praying, by her couch I knelt,
Behold, my Adeliza, mark, she said,
How happy the death-bed of innocence! *
Oh! lady, how those sounds affected me!
I wish'd to die with her—and oh! forgive me,
If in that moment I forgot my patroness!

COUNTESS.

It was a wish devout. Can that want pardon?
But to confess it, speaks thy native candour.
Thy virtuous, thy ingenuous truth disdains
To hide a thought—

ADELIZA, *falling at her feet.*

Oh! can I hear this praise,
And not expire in blushes at thy feet?

COUNTESS.

What means this passion?

ADELIZA.

Ah! recall thy words:
Thy Adeliza merits no encomium.

* Dr. Young relates that Mr. Addison, on his death-bed, spoke in this manner to his pupil Lord Warwick.

49 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

COUNTESS.

Thou art too modest. Praise is due to truth.
Thou should'st not seek it; nor should I withhold it.

ADELIZA.

For pity, spare me.—No, my honour'd mistress,
I merit not—oh! no, my guilty heart
Deserves thy frowns—I cannot speak—

COUNTESS.

Be calm:

Thou know'st no guilt. Unfold thy lab'ring breast.
Say, am not I thy friend? Me canst thou fear?

ADELIZA.

Can I fear ought beside? Fear ought but goodness?
Has not thy lavish bounty cloath'd me, fed me?
Hast thou not taught me virtue? Whom on earth,
But such a benefactress, such a friend,
Can Adéliza fear? Alas! she knows
No other friend! and christian fortitude
Dreads not a foe. Methinks I would have said
That christian innocence—but shame restrain'd
My conscious tongue—I am *not* innocent?

COUNTESS.

Thou dearest orphan, to my bosom come,
And vent thy little sorrows. Purity
Like thine affrights itself with fancied guilt.
I'll be thy confessor; and trust me, love,
Thy penance will be light.

ADELIZA.

In vain you chear me.

Say, what is guilt, but to have known a thought
I blush'd to tell thee? To have lent mine ear,
For three long weeks, to sounds I did not wish
My patroness should hear! Ah! when till now

Have

Have I not hoped thy presence, thought it long,
If two whole days detain'd thee from our mass?
When have I wept, but when thou hast refus'd
To let thy Adeliza call thee mother?
I know I was not worthy of such honour,
Too splendid for a child of charity.
I now am most unworthy! I, undone,
Have not desir'd thy presence; have not thought it
Long, if two days thou hast declin'd our mass.
Other discourse than thine has charm'd mine ear;
Nor dare I now presume to call thee mother!

COUNTESS.

My lovely innocence, restrain thy tears.
I know thy secret; know, why beats and throbs
Thy little heart with unaccustom'd tumult.

ADELIZA.

Impossible.—Oh! let me tell thee all—

COUNTESS.

No; I will tell it thee. Thou hast convers'd
With a young knight—

ADELIZA.

Amazement! Who inform'd thee?
Pent in her chamber, sickness has detain'd
Our abbess from the parlour. There I saw him,
Oft as he came alone.

COUNTESS.

He talk'd of love;
And woo'd thee for his bride.

ADELIZA.

He did.

COUNTESS.

(Tis well: [*Aside.*

This is the stranger I beheld this morning.)

His

42 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

His father dead, he hastes to take possession
Of his paternal fortunes—is't not so?

ADELIZA.

He sorrows for a father—something too
He utter'd of a large inheritance
That should be his—in truth I mark'd it not,

COUNTESS.

But when he spoke of love, thy very soul
Hung on his lips. Say, canst thou not repeat
Each word, each syllable? His accent too
Thou notedst: still it rings upon thine ear.
And then his eyes—they look'd such wond'rous truth;
Art thou not sure he cannot have deceiv'd thee?

ADELIZA.

Alas! my noble mistress, thou dost mock
Poor Adeliza—what can I reply!

COUNTESS.

The truth. Thy words have ever held its language.
Say, dost thou love this stranger? Hast thou pledg'd
Thy faith to him?

ADELIZA.

Angels forbid! What faith have I to give?
Can I dispose of ought without thy leave?

COUNTESS.

Insinuating softness!—still thou turnest
Aside my question. Thou dost love this stranger.

ADELIZA.

Yes, with such love as that I feel for thee.
His virtues I revere: his earnest words
Sound like the precepts of a tender parent:
And, next to thee, methinks I could obey him.

COUNTESS.

Ay, as his wife.

ADELIZA,

ADELIZA.

Oh! never, What, to lose him,
As thou thy Narbonne!

COUNTESS.

Check not, Adeliza,
Thy undevelop'd passion. Should this stranger
Prove what my wish has form'd, and what his words
Report him, it would bless my woeful days
To see thee plac'd above the reach of want,
And distant from this residence of sorrow.

ADELIZA.

What! wouldst thou send me from thee! oh! for pity!
I cannot, will not leave thee. If thy goodness
Withdraw its bounty, at thy castle-gate
I'll wait and beg those alms thy gracious hand
To none refuses. I shall see thee pass,
And, pass'd, will kiss thy footsteps—wil't thou spurn
me?

Well then, I'll die, and bless thee—Oh! this stranger!
'Tis he has done this; he has drawn thy anger
On thy poor ward!—I'll never see him more.

COUNTESS.

Be calm, my lovely orphan; hush thy fears.
Heav'n knows how fondly, anxiously I love thee!
The stranger's not to blame. Myself will task him,
And know if he deserves thee. Now retire,
Nor slack thy duty to th' expiring saint.
A lover must not weigh against a friend. [Ex. ADELIZA.
And lo! where comes the friar. 'Twere not fit
He knew my purpose. Benedict, I fear,
Has views on this side heav'n.

SCENE

44 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

S C E N E III.

COUNTESS, BENEDICT.

BENEDICT.

The dew of grace

Rest on this dwelling!

COUNTESS.

Thanks, my ghostly friend.

But sure, or I mistake, in your sad eye
I spell affliction's signature. What woes
Call for the scanty balm this hand can pour?

BENEDICT.

You, lady, and you only need that balm.

COUNTESS.

To tutor my unapt and ill-school'd nature
You come then—Good, my confessor, a truce
With doctrines and authority. If ought
Can medicate a soul unsound like mine,
Good deeds must operate the healthful change,
And penance cleanse it to receive the blessing.
Shall I for faith, shall I, for but believing
What 'tis my int'rest to believe, efface
The stains, which, tho' believing, I contracted?

BENEDICT.

Lady, your subtle wit, like daring infants,
Sports with a weight will crush it—but no more.
It is not mine to argue, but pronounce.
The church, on rock of adamant establish'd,
Now inch by inch disputes not its domain.
Heav'n's law promulg'd, it rests obedience follow.
And when supreme It taxes that obedience,

Not

Not at impracticable, vain perfection,
 But rates its prodigality of blessings
 At the slight credence of its pow'r to grant them;
 Shall man with stoic pride reject the boon,
 And cry, we will do more, we will deserve it? •

COUNTESS.

Deserve it!—oh! have all your sainted hosts,
 Your choirs of martyrs, or your clouds of cherubim,
 Deserv'd to feel the transport but of hope?
 Away; nor tell me of this holy juggle
 'Twixt faith and conscience. Shall the latter roam,
 Wasting and spoiling with a ruffian hand,
 While her accomplice faith, wrapt up at home
 In proud security of self-existence,
 Thinks that existence shall absolve them both?

BENEDICT.

'Twas not to war with words, so heav'n's my judge,
 That your poor rated servant sought your presence.
 I came with charitable friendly purpose
 To sooth—but wherefore mitigate your griefs?
 You mock my friendship, and miscall my zeal.
 Since then to council, comfort, and reproof
 Obdurate—learn the measure of your woes.
 Learn, if the mother's fortitude can brave
 The bolt the woman's arrogance defied.

COUNTESS.

The mother! said'st thou?

BENEDICT.

Yes, imperious dame:
 Yes, 'twas no vision rais'd by dreams and fumes,
 Begot 'twixt nightly fear and indigestion:

We will do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it. Portius in CARO.

Nor

46 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Nor was it artifice and pious fraud,
When but this morning I announç'd thy Edmund
Was number'd with the dead—

COUNTESS.

Priest, mock me not!
Nor dally with a mother's apprehension.
Lives, or lives not my son?

BENEDICT.

Woman, heav'n mocks thee!
On Buda's plain thy slaughter'd Edmund lies:
An unbeliever's weapon cleft his heart;
But 'twas thy unbelief that pois'd the shaft,
And sped its aim.

COUNTESS.

To heav'n's high will I bow me,
Oh! may its joys be open to his soul,
Tho' clos'd to mine for ever!

BENEDICT.

Then you lov'd him!

COUNTESS.

Lov'd him!—oh! nature, bleeding at my heart,
Hearest thou this? Lov'd him!—ha! whither!—rage,
Be dumb—Now, listen, monk, nor dare reply
Beyond my purpose. In the grave, thou say'st,
My Edmund sleeps—how didst thou learn his fate?

BENEDICT.

No angel whisper'd it; no dæmon spoke it.
Thou, by the self-same means I learn'd, may'st learn it.

COUNTESS.

Be brief.

BENEDICT.

Then—but what boots his life or death
To a poor taunted friar—Benedict,

Leave

A TRAGEDY. 47

Leave this proud mistress of the fleeting hour,
E'er the destroying angel's kindling brand
Smoaks in the tow'rs of Narbonne—

COUNTESS.

Hold! presumptuous!

I am thy mistress yet: nor will I brook
Such insolent reproof. Produce thy warrant,
Assure my Edmund's death—or dread his vengeance!
Severely shall he question ev'ry throb
His agonizing mother now endures.

BENEDICT.

My warrant is at hand— [Goes out and returns
with EDMUND.

SCENE IV.

COUNTESS, BENEDICT, EDMUND.

BENEDICT.

This gentleman
Beheld thy Edmund breathless on the ground.

COUNTESS.

Hah! is this sorcery! or is't my husband? [Swoons.

EDMUND.

Stand off, and let me clasp her in my arms!
The flame of filial fondness shall revive
The lamp of life, repay the breath she gave,
And waken all the mother in her soul.

BENEDICT.

Hah! who art thou then?

EDMUND.

Do not my fears tell thee!

Look up! O ever dear! behold thy son!

It

48 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

It is thy Edmund's voice ; blest, if thy eyes
Awake to bless him—Soft ! her pulse returns ;
She breathes—oh ! speak. Dear parent, mother, hear !
'Tis Edmund—Friar, wherefore is this horror ?
Am I then deadly to her eyes ?—Dumb still !
Speak, tho' it be to curse me—I have kill'd her !
My brain grows hot—

BENEDICT.

My lord, restrain your passion ;

See ! she revives—

EDMUND.

Oh ! if these lips that quiver
With dread of thy disdain, have force to move thee
With nature's, duty's, or affection's voice,
Feel how I print thy hand with burning zeal,
Tho' tortur'd at this awful interval !
Art thou, or not, a mother ?

COUNTESS.

Hah ! where am I ?

Why do you hold me ? Was it not my Narbonne ?
I saw him—on my soul I did—

EDMUND.

Alas !

She raves—recall thy wand'ring apprehension—
It was no phantom : at thy feet behold—

COUNTESS.

Hah ! whom ! quick, answer—Narbonne, dost thou live ?
Or comest to transport me to perdition ?

BENEDICT.

Madam, behold your son : he kneels for pardon.
And I, I innocent, I ignorant
Of what he was, implore it too—

COUNTESS.

A TRAGEDY.

29

COUNTESS.

Distraction!

What means this complicated scene of horrors?

Why thus assail my splitting brain?—be quick—

Art thou my husband wing'd from other orbs

To taunt my soul? What is this dubious form,

Impress'd with ev'ry feature I adore,

And every lineament I dread to look on!

Art thou my dead or living son?

EDMUND.

I am

Thy living Edmund. Let these scalding tears

Attest th' existence of thy suff'ring son.

COUNTESS.

Ah! touch me not—

EDMUND.

How!—in that cruel breast

Revive then all sensations, but affection?

Why so ador'd the memory of the father,

And so abhorr'd the presence of the son?

But now, and to thy eyes I seem'd my father—

At least for that resemblance—fake embrace me.

COUNTESS.

Horror on horror! Blasted be thy tongue!

What sounds are those!

BENEDICT.

Lady, tho' I excuse not

This young lord's disobedience, his contrition

Bespeaks no rebel principle. I doubt not,

Your blessing first obtain'd and gracious pardon,

But soon as morning streaks the ruddy East,

He will obey your pleasure, and return

To stranger climes—

E

EDMUND.

50 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

EDMUND.

'Tis false; I will not hence.
 I have been fool'd too long, too long been patient.
 Nor are my years so green as to endure
 The manacles of priests and nurseries.
 Am I not Narbonne's prince? who shall rule here
 But Narbonne? Have I sapp'd my country's laws,
 Or play'd the tyrant? Who shall banish me?
 Am I a recreant knight? Has cowardice
 Disgrac'd the line of heroes I am sprung from?
 Shall I then skulk, hide my inglorious head?
 Or does it please your worship's gravity
 Dispatch me on some sleeveless pilgrimage,
 Like other noble fools, to win you empires;
 While you at home mock our credulity,
 The masters of our wealth, our states, and wives?

COUNTESS.

Aside.] (Brave youth! there spoke his fire. How my
 soul yearns

To own its genuine offspring!)—Edmund, hear me!
 Thou art my son, and I will prove a mother.
 But I'm thy sov'reign too. This state is mine.
 Learn to command, by learning to obey.
 Tho' frail my sex, I have a soul as masculine
 As any of thy race. This very monk,
 Lord as thou thinkest of my ductile conscience,
 Quails—look if 'tis not true—when I command.
 Retire thee to the village. 'Tis not ripe
 As yet my purpose—Benedict, attend me.
 To-morrow, Edmund, shalt thou learn my pleasure.

[*Ex. COUNTESS and BENEDICT.*]

EDMUND, *alone.*

Why, this is majesty. Sounds of such accent

Ne'er

Ne'er struck mine ear till now. Commanding sex!
 Strength, courage, all our boasted attributes,
 Want estimation; ev'n the preheminance
 We vaunt in wisdom, seems a borrow'd ray,
 When virtue deigns to speak with female organs.
 Yes, O my mother, I *will* learn t'obey:
 I *will* believe, that, harsh as thy decrees,
 They wear the warrant of benign intention.
 Make but the blooming Adeliza mine,
 And bear, of me unquestion'd, Narbonne's sceptre;
 Till life's expiring lamp by intervals
 Throws but a fainter and a fainter flash,
 And then relumes its wasted oil no more. [Exit,

End of the Third Act.

32 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

ACT the FOURTH.

The SCENE continues.

BENEDICT, MARTIN.

MARTIN.

I Know thy spirit well ; know how it labours,
When curb'd and driv'n to wear the mask of art.
But till this hour I have not seen thy passions
Boil o'er the bounds of prudence. So impetuous,
And so reserv'd !

BENEDICT.

Mistake me not, good brother :
I want no confidence : I know thy faith.
But can I to thy naked eye unfold,
What I dare scarce reveal to my own bosom ?
I would not know one half that I suspect,
Till I have acted as if not suspecting.

MARTIN.

How, brother ! thou a casuist ! and apply
To thy own breast those damning subtleties,
Which cowards with half-winking consciences
Purchase of us, when they would sin secure,
And hope the penalty will all be ours !

BENEDICT.

Brother, this moment is too big with action
To waste on bootless curiosity.
When I try sins upon the touchstone conscience,
It is for others use, not for my own.
'Tis time enough to make up our account,
When we confess and kneel for absolution.

MARTIN.

MARTIN.

Still does thy genius soar above mankind!
How many fathers of our holy church
In Benedict I view!

BENEDICT.

No flattery, brother.
'Tis true the church owes Benedict some thanks,
For her, I have forgot I am a man.
For her, each virtue from my breast I banish.
No laws I know but her prosperity;
No country, but her boundless acquisitions.
Who dares be true to country, king, or friend,
If enemies to Rome, are Benedict's foes.

MARTIN.

Has it then gone so far? Does she speak out?
Is Edmund too infected with like errors?

BENEDICT.

Both, brother, both are thinking heretics.
I could forgive them, did some upstart sect
With sharper rigours charm their headlong zeal,
But they, in sooth, must *reason*—curfes light
On the proud talent! 'twill at last undo us.
When men are gorged with each absurdity
Their subtle wits can frame, or we adopt;
For very novelty they will fly to sense,
And we shall fall before that idol, *fashion*.

MARTIN.

Fear not a reign so transient. Statesmen too
Will join to stem the torrent: or new follies
Replace the old. Each chieftain that attacks us
Must grow the pope of his own heresy.
E'en stern philosophy, if once triumphant,
Shall frame some jargon, and exact obedience

54 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

To metaphysic nonsense worse than ours.
The church is but a specious name for empire,
And will exist wherever fools have fears.
Rome is no city ; 'tis the human heart ;
And there suffice it if we plant our banners.
Each priest cannot command—and thence come sects.
Obdurate Zeno and our great Augustine
Are of one faith, and differ but for power.

BENEDICT.

So be it—therefore interest bids us crush
This cockatrice and her egg : or we shall see
The singing saints of Savoy's neighb'ring vale
Fly to the covert of her shadowy wings,
And foil us at our own dexterity.
Already to those vagrants she inclines ;
As if the rogues, that preach reform to others,
Like idiots, minded to reform themselves.

MARTIN.

Be cautious, brother : you may lose the lady.

BENEDICT.

She is already lost—or ne'er was ours.
I cannot dupe, and therefore must destroy her :
Involve her house in ruin so prodigious,
That neither she nor Edmund may survive it.

MARTIN.

How may this be accomplish'd ?

BENEDICT.

Ask me not.

From hints long treasur'd up, from broken phrase
In frenzy dropp'd, but vibrating from truth :
Nay, from her caution to explain away
What the late tempest of her soul had utter'd,
I guess her fatal secret—or, no matter—

Say,

A TRAGEDY.

55

Say, I do not—by what she has forbidden,
I know what should be done—then haste thee, brother;
Facilitate count Edmund's interview
With Adeliza; nourish their young passion—
Curse them—and if you can—why—join their hands.

MARTIN.

I tremble!

BENEDICT.

Dastard, tremble, if we fail.

What can we fear, when we have ruin'd them?

(A deep-toned voice is heard.)

Forbear!

BENEDICT.

Ha! whence that sound!

(Voice again.) Forbear!

BENEDICT.

Again!

Comes it from heav'n or hell?

(Voice again.) Forbear!

MARTIN.

Good angels,

Protect me!—Benedict, thy unholy purpose—

S C E N E II.

BENEDICT, MARTIN, ADELIZA, FRIARS.

[A procession of friars, chanting a funeral anthem, and followed by ADELIZA, advance slowly from a cloyster at the end of the stage.]

The ANTHEM.

Forbear! forbear! forbear!

The pious are heav'n's care.

E 4

Lamentations

56 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Lamentations ill become us,
When the good are ravish'd from us.
The pangs of death but smooth the way
To visions of eternal day.

BENEDICT. [*Aside to MARTIN.*
Now, man of aspin conscience! lo! the gods,
That sentence Benedict's unholy purpose!
Art thou a priest? Wast thou initiated
In each fond mummery that subdues the vulgar,
And standest thou appall'd at our own thunders?

MARTIN.
Who trembled first? It was thy guilty conscience
That gave th' alarm to mine.

BENEDICT.
Peace, dotard, peace!
Nor when the lamb is nigh, must eagles wrangle.
Fair saint, give us to know why flow these tears;
[*To ADELIZA.*

Why sighs that gentle bosom; and why chant ye
That heav'n-invoking soul-dissolving dirge?

ADELIZA.
Ah! holy father, art thou then to learn
The pious abbess is at peace? We go
To bear her parting blessing to the Countess,

BENEDICT.
It must not be. Occasions of much import
Engross her faculties. By me she wills you
Restrain your steps within the cloyster's pale,
Nor grant access but to one stranger knight.

ADELIZA.
Is't possible? Can my dear mistress bar
Her faithful handmaid from her gracious presence?

Shall

A TRAGEDY. THE 57

Shall I not pour my sorrows in her bosom,
And moisten it with grief and gratitude?
Two friends were all poor Adeliza's wealth.
Lo! one is gone to plead the orphan's cause.
My patroness, like Tobit's guardian spirit*,
Confirms my steps, and points to realms of glory.
She will not quit me in this vale of bondage;
She must be good, who teaches what is goodness.

BENEDICT.

(Indeed! my pretty prattler!—then am I [Aside.
As sound a saint as e'er the rubric boasted.
—Ha! 'tis the Countess—now for my obedience.)
Young lady, much I marvel at these murmurs:
[To ADELIZA]

Just sense and sober piety still dictate
The Countess's commands. With truth I say it,
My sins diminish, as I copy her.

SCENE III.

COUNTESS, ADELIZA, BENEDICT,
MARTIN.

COUNTESS.

What voices heard I? Does my rebel son
Attempt against my peace?—Hah! Adeliza!
I charg'd thee guard thy convent—wherefore then
This disobedience?

BENEDICT.

Madam, I was urging

* Alluding to a picture of Salvator Rosa, in which the story is thus told.

58 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

The fitness of your orders; but vain youth
Scoff'd my importunate rebuke—

ADELIZA.

Oh! no.

I am the thing you made me. Crush me, spurn me,
I will not murmur. Should you bid me die,
I know 'twere meant in kindness.

COUNTESS.

Bid *thee* die!

My own detested life but lingers round thee!
Ha! what a glance was there! it spoke resemblance
To all I hate, adore—My child, retire:
I am much discompos'd—the good old abbess
Claims thy attendance.

ADELIZA.

Mercy crown her soul!

She needs no duty we can pay her now!

COUNTESS.

How! art thou desolate! not a friend left
To guard thy innocence?—Oh! wretched maid!
Must thou be left to spoilers? or worse, worse,
To the fierce onset of thy own dire passions?
Oh! is it come to this?

ADELIZA.

My noble mistress,

Can Adeliza want a ministring angel,
When shelter'd by thy wing?—yet Benedict
Says, I must shun this hospitable roof.
Indeed I thought it hard.

COUNTESS.

Did Benedict,

Did he audacious dare forbid my child,

My

My little orphan to embrace her—curfes
Swell in my throat—hence—or they fall on thee,

ADELIZA.

Alas! for pity! how have I offended?

BENEDICT.

Madam, it is the pupil of your care,
Your favour'd child—

COUNTESS.

Who told thee so? Be dumb

For ever—What art thou combin'd with Edmund,
To dash me down the precipice? Churchman, I tell thee,
I view it with impatience. I could leap
And meet the furies—but must *she* fall with me!

BENEDICT.

Aside.] (Yes, and thy Edmund too)—Be patient, lady:
This fair domain, thou know'st, acknowledges
The sovereignty of the church. Thy rebel son
Dares not attempt—

COUNTESS.

Again I bid thee peace.

There is no question of lord Edmund. Leave us:
I have to talk with her alone.

BENEDICT. [*Aside to MARTIN.*

(Now tremble

At voices supernatural; and forfeit
The spoils the tempest throws into our lap.)

[*Ex. BENEDICT and MARTIN.*

SCENE

60 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

S C E N E IV.

COUNTESS, ADELIZA.

COUNTESS.

Now, Adeliza, summon all thy courage.
Retrace my precepts past : nor let a tear
Profane a moment that's worth martyrdom.
Remember patience is the christian's courage,
Stoics have bled, and demigods have died.
A christian's task is harder—'tis to suffer.

ADELIZA.

Alas ! have I not learnt the bitter lesson ?
Have I not borne *thy* woes ? What is to come
Can tax my patience with a ruder trial ?

COUNTESS.

Oh ! yes, thou must do more. Adversity
Has various arrows. When the soul is steel'd
By meditation to encounter sorrow,
The foe of man shifts his artillery,
And drowns in luxury and careless softness
The breast he could not storm. Canst thou bear wealth,
And pleasure's melting couch ? Thou hast known virtue
But at a scanty board. She has awak'd thee
To chilling vapours in the midnight vault,
And beckon'd thee to hardships, tears, and penance.
Wilt thou acknowledge the divine instructress,
When syren pleasures lap thee in delights ?

ADELIZA.

If such the witchery that waits on guilt,
Why should I seek th' enchantress and her wiles ?

The

A TRAGEDY. 61

The virgin veil shall guard my spotless hours,
Assure my peace, and saint me for hereafter.

COUNTESS.

It cannot be—
To Narbonne thou must bid a last adieu!
And with the stranger knight depart a bride.

ADELIZA.

Unhappy me! too sure I have o'erburthen'd
Thy charity, if thou wouldst drive me from thee.
Restrain thy alms, dear lady. I have learnt
From our kind sister-hood the needle's art.
My needle and thy smiles will life support.
Pray let me bring my last embroidery;
'Tis all by my own hand. Indeed I meant it
For my kind lady's festival.

COUNTESS.

Great justice!

Does this stroke pierce not deep enough? These tears,
Wrung from my vital fondness, scald they not
Worse than the living coal that sears the limbs?

ADELIZA.

Alas! thou hearest not! What grief o'erwhelms thee?
Why darts thy eye into my inmost soul?
Then vacant, motionless, arrests its course,
And seems not to perceive what it reads there?
My much-lov'd patroness!

COUNTESS.

O Adeliza,

Thy words now flake, and now augment my fever!
But oh! e'er reason quits this lab'ring frame,
While I dare weep these tears of anguish o'er thee,
Unutterable, petrifying anguish!

Hear

62 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Hear my last breath. Avoid the scorpion pleasure.
Death lurks beneath the velvet of his lip,
And but to think him over, is perdition!
—O retrospect of horror!—To the altar!
Haste, Adeliza,—vow thou wilt be wretched!

ADELIZA.

Dost thou then doom me to eternal sorrows?
Hast thou deceiv'd me? is not virtue, happiness?

COUNTESS.

I know not that, I know that guilt is torture.

ADELIZA.

Sure pestilence has flapp'd his baleful wing,
And shed its poison o'er thy saintlike reason!
When thou so patient, holy, so resign'd,
Doubtest of virtue's health, of virtue's peace.
—But 'tis to try me—look upon this relick:
'Twas the good abbess's bequest. 'Twill chase
The fiend that walks at twilight.

COUNTESS.

How she melts me!

What have I said—my lovely innocence,
Thou art my only thought—Oh! wast thou form'd
The child of sin?—and dare I not embrace thee?
Must I with eager ecstasy gaze on thee,
Yet curse the hour that stamp'd thee with a being!

ADELIZA.

Alas! was I then born the child of sin!
Who were my parents? I will pray for them.

COUNTESS.

Oh! if the bolt must come, here let it strike me!

[Flinging herself on the ground.

Nature! these feelings were thy gift. Thou knowest
How ill I can resist thy forceful impulse.

If

If these emotions are imputed to me,
I have one sin I cannot yet repent of!

ADELIZA.

Oh! raise thee from the earth. Shall I behold thee
Prostrate, embracing an unfriended beggar?
Or dost thou mock me still? What is my lot?
Wilt thou yet cherish me? Or do the great
Exalt us but in sport, lend us a taste,
A vision of enjoyment, and then dash us
To poverty, more poignant by comparison?
—Sure I could never wanton with affliction!

COUNTESS.

Ah! canst thou doubt this conflict of the soul!
Mock thee!—oh! yes, there are such savage natures,
That will deride thy woes—and thou must bear it—
With foul reproach will gall thy spotless soul,
And taunt thee with a crime past thy conceiving.
Oh! 'tis to shield thee from this world of sorrows,
That thou must fly, must wed, must never view
The tow'rs of Narbonne more; must never know
The doom reserv'd for thy sad patroness!

ADELIZA.

Who threatens thy dear life! recall thy son.
His valiant arm will stem a host of foes,
Replace thy lord, and woo thee to be happy.

COUNTESS.

Hah! little imp of darkness! dost thou wear
That angel form to gird me with upbraidings!
Fly, e'er my rage forget distinction, nature,
And make a medley of unheard-of crimes.
Fly, e'er it be too late—

ADELIZA.

For pity!

COUNTESS.

64 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

COUNTESS.

Hence!

Pity would bid me stab thee, while the charm
Of ignorance locks thee in its happy slumbers.

ADELIZA.

Alas! she raves—I will call help. [Exit.

COUNTESS, alone.

[After a long pause, in which she looks
tenderly after ADELIZA.

She's gone.

—That pang, great God, was my last sacrifice!
Now recollect thyself, my soul! consummate
The pomp of horror with tremendous coolness.
'Tis fit that reason punish passion's crime.
—Reason!—alas! 'tis one of my convulsions!
Now it empow'rs me past myself: now leaves me
Exhausted, spiritless, eying with despair
The heights I cannot reach. Then madness comes;
Imperial fool! and promises to waft me
Beyond the grin of scorn—but who sits there,
Supereminent?—'tis conscience!—phrenzy shield me!
I know the foe—see! see! he points his lance!
He plunges it all flaming in my soul;
And down I sink, lost in eternal anguish! [Runs out.

S C E N E V.

BENEDICT, ADELIZA.

ADELIZA.

She is not here. Shall we not follow her?
Such agonies of passion! sure some dæmon

Assaults

Assaults her. Thou shalt pray by her. Indeed
I tremble for her life.

BENEDICT.

Thou know'st her not.

Her transport is fictitious. 'Tis the coinage
Of avarice and caprice. Dost thou not see
Her bounty wearies? While thy babbling years
Wore the trick of novelty, thou wast her plaything.
The charity of the great must be amus'd.
Mere merit surfeits it; affliction kills it.
The sick must jest and gambol to attract
Their pity—Come, I'll warrant, thou hast wept,
And told her heav'n would register each ducat
Her piety had spar'd to cloathe and feed thee.
Go to; thou hast estrang'd her; and she means
To drive thee hence, lest thou upbraid her change.

ADELIZA.

Upbraid my patroness! I! I upbraid her,
Who see her now the angel that she will be!
How knew I virtue, goodness, but from her!
Her lessons taught me heav'n; her life reveal'd it.
The wings of gratitude must bear me thither,
Or I deserve not Paradise.

BENEDICT.

Thou art young.

Thy novice ear imbibes each silver sound,
And deems the music warbled all by truth.
Grey hairs are not fool'd thus. I know this Countess:
An errant heretic. She scoffs the church.
When did her piety adorn our altars?
What holy garments glisten with her gifts?
The fabric of our convent threatens ruin—
Does she repair it?—no. On lazy lepers,

F

On

66 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

On soldiers maim'd and swearing from the wars
She lavishes her wealth—but note it, young one;
Her days are number'd; and thou shalt do wisely
To quit her e'er the measure is compleat.

ADELIZA.

Alas! she bids me go. She bids me wed
The stranger knight that woo'd me at our parlour.

BENEDICT.

And thou shalt take her at her word. Myself
Will join your hands—and lo! in happy hour
Who comes to meet her boon.

S C E N E VI.

EDMUND, BENEDICT, ADELIZA.

EDMUND.

In tears!—that cowl
Shall not protect th' injurious tongue, that dares
Insult thy innocence—for sure, thou dear one,
Thou hast no sins to weep.

BENEDICT.

My gracious lord,
Yourself and virgin coyness must be chidden,
If my fair scholar wears the mien of sadness.
'Tis but a blush that melts in modest showers.

EDMUND.

Unriddle, priest. My soul is too impatient
To wait th' impertinence of flow'ry dialect.

BENEDICT.

Then briefly thus. The Countess wills me join
Your hand with this fair maiden's—now, my lord,
Is my poor language nauseous?

A TRAGEDY.

67

EDMUND.

Is it possible?

Dost thou consent, sweet passion of my soul?

May I then clasp thee to my heart?

ADELIZA.

Forbear!

It must not be—Thou shalt not wed a beggar.

EDMUND.

A beggar! Thou art riches, opulence.

The flaming ruby and the dazzling di'mond,

Set in the world's first diadem, could not add

A ray to thy least charm—for pity, grant me

To breathe my warmth into this marble hand.

ADELIZA.

Never!—This orphan, this abandon'd wanderer,

Taunted with poverty, with shameful origine,

Dower'd with no lot but scorn, shall ne'er bestow

That, her sole portion, on a lordly husband.

BENEDICT.

My lord, the Countess is my gracious mistress:

My duty bade me to report her words.

It seems her charities circumscribe her wishes.

This goodly maiden has full long experienc'd

Her amplest bounty. Other piteous objects

Call for her largess. Lovely Adeliza

Plac'd in your arms can never feel affliction.

This the good Countess knows—

EDMUND.

By my sire's soul

I will not thank her. Has she dar'd to scorn thee,

Thou beauteous excellence?—then from this hour

Thou art her equal. In her very presence

F 2

I will

68 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

I will espouse thee. Let us seek the proud one!
—Nay, no resistance, love!

BENEDICT.

(By heav'n all's lost, [*Aside.*
Should they meet now) — My lord, a word. The
—maiden [*Aside to EDMUND.*
Is tutor'd to such awe, she ne'er will yield
Consent, should but a frown dart from the Countess.
But now, and she enjoin'd your marriage. Better
Profit of that behest—

EDMUND.

I tell thee, monk,
My haughty soul will not—

BENEDICT.

Pray be advis'd.
Heav'n knows how dear I tender your felicity.
The chapel is few paces hence—nay, lead her
With gentle wooing, nor alarm her fears.
Arriv'd there, I will speedily pronounce
The solemn words—

EDMUND.

Well, be it so. My fair one,
This holy man advises well. To heaven
We will address our vows, and ask its pleasure.
Come, come; I will not be refus'd—

ADELIZA.

Yes, heav'n!
To thee I fly; thou art my only refuge. [*Exeunt.*

End of the Fourth Act.

ACT

A C T the F I F T H.

*The SCENE continues.**Enter BENEDICT.*

THE business is dispatch'd. Their hands are join'd.
 The puling moppet struggled with her wishes;
 Invok'd each saint to witness her refusal:
 Nor heeded, tho' I swore their golden harps
 Were tun'd to greet her hymeneal hour.
 Th' impetuous count, fired with th' impure suggestion,
 As if descending clouds had spread their pillows
 To meet the pressure of his eager transports,
 Would have forerun the rites. The maid affrighted
 At such tumultuous unaccustom'd onset,
 Sunk lifeless on the pavement. Hastily
 I mumbled o'er the spell that binds them fast,
 Like an invenom'd robe, to scorch each other
 With mutual ruin — Thus am I reveng'd.
 Proud dame of Narbonne, lo! a bare-foot monk
 Thus pays thy scorn, thus vindicates his altars.
 Nor while this woollen frock shall wrap our order,
 Shall e'en the lillied monarchs of our realm
 Be plac'd so high, but a poor friar's knife *
 Shall sell their tow'ring grandeur to the earth,
 Oft as they scant obedience to the church.

* Alluding to the assassinations of Henry III. and IV.

70 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

S C E N E II.

BENEDICT, PORTER.

PORTER.

Ah ! woe of woes ! good father, haste thee in,
And speak sweet words of comfort to our mistress.
Her brain is much disturb'd—I fear some spell,
Or naughty bev'rage—will you not in and pray by her ?
In sooth she needs your pray'rs.

BENEDICT.

She scorns my pray'rs. [*Coldly.*]

PORTER.

Oh ! no ; but now she call'd for you. Pray seek her.

BENEDICT.

I can administer no comfort to her.

PORTER.

Yes, yes, you can. They say the foul fiend dreads
A scholar—Tut, your holy wit can poze him,
Or bind him to the red waves of the ocean.
Oh ! he afflicts her gentle spirit, and vomits
Strange menaces and terrible from her mouth ?
Then he is sullen ; gags her lab'ring lips,
And she replies not—

BENEDICT.

Goodman exorcist,

Thy pains are unavailing. Her sins press her.
Guilt has unhing'd her reason.

PORTER.

Beshrew thy heart,
Thou dost asperse her. I know those are paid
For being saints that—

BENEDICT.

A TRAGEDY.

71

BENEDICT.

Stop that tongue profane :

Thou art infected with her heresies.

“ Judgments already have o’erta’en thy mistress.

“ Thou at thy peril leave her to her fate.”

PORTER.

“ Father, belike there is a different heaven

“ For learned clerks and such poor men as I am.

“ Me it behoves to have such humble virtues

“ As suit my simple calling. To my masters

“ For raiment, food, for salary, and protection

“ My honest heart owes gratitude. They took me

“ From drudgery to guard their honour’d persons.

“ Why am I call’d a man of worship? Why,

“ As up the chancel I precede my lady,

“ Do th’ vassals of the castle, rang’d in rows,

“ Bow e’en to Peter?—why? but, by the rood,

“ Because she plac’d this silver-garnish’d staff

“ In Peter’s hand. Why, but because this robe,

“ Floating with seemly tufts, was her gift too.

“ For honours of such note owe I not thanks?

“ Were my life much to sacrifice for hers?”

BENEDICT.

“ Peace with thy saucy lecture, or harangue

“ Thy maudling fellows o’er the hall’s dull embers

“ With this thy gossiping morality.”—

Now answer—mentions she her son?

PORTER.

Ah me!

I had forgotten—this old brain—’tis true,

’Tis very true—she raves upon her son,

And thinks he came in vision.

BENEDICT.

’Twas no vision,

F 4

PORTER.

72 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

PORTER.

How ! heav'nly fathers !

BENEDICT.

He has spoken with her.

PORTER.

And I not see him !—go to ; it could not be.

How did he pass the gate ?

BENEDICT.

I tell thee, Edmund,

Thy quondam master's son, has seen his mother ;

Is but few paces hence.

PORTER.

Oh ! joyous sounds !

Where is my noble lord ?

BENEDICT.

Here—and undone.

S C E N E III.

FLORIAN, BENEDICT, PORTER.

FLORIAN.

Sure the foul fogs, that hang in lazy clouds

O'er yonder moat, infect the moping air,

And steam with phrenzy's melancholy fumes,

But now and I met Edmund—with a voice

Appall'd and hollow like a parricide's,

He told me he was wedded. When I asked

To see his bride, he groan'd, and said his joys

Were blasted e'er accomplish'd. As he urg'd

His suit, the maiden's tears and shrieks had struck

On his sick fancy like his mother's cries !

Th' idea writhing from his brain, had won

His eye-balls, and he thought he saw his mother !

—This

—This ague of contagious bigotry
Has gain'd almost on me. Methinks yon monk
Might sell me with a chaplet—Edmund left me
Abruptly—I must learn this mystery.

[To BENEDICT.]

[To PETER.]

Health to your rev'rence—Hah! my new acquaintance!
In tears, my good old friend! What has the cricket
Chirp'd ominously—come, away with sorrow:
Joy marks this day its own.

PORTER.

A joyful day!

The twentieth of September!—note it, sir,
Note it for th' ugliest of the calendar.
'Twas on this day—ay, this day sixteen years
The noble count came to his death!

FLORIAN.

No matter.

Th' arrival of a nobler younger count
Shall mock prognostics past, and paint the year
With smiling white, fair fortune's fav'rite livery.
But tell me, father, tell me, has the Countess

[To BENEDICT.]

Pardon'd her son's return? Has she receiv'd him
With th' overflowings of a mother's joy?
Smiles she upon his wishes—As I enter'd
Methought I heard an hymeneal accent.
And yet, it seems, the favour of your countenance
Wears not the benediction of rejoicing.

BENEDICT.

The Countess must unfold her book of fate.
I am not skill'd to read so dark a volume.

FLORIAN.

Oracular as the Delphic god!—good Peter,

10

Thy

74 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

Thy wit and mine are more upon a level.
 Resolve me, has the Countess seen lord Edmund?
 Say, did she frown and chide? or bathe his cheek
 With tears as warm as leaping blood?

P O R T E R.

Ah! master,

You seem too good to mock our misery.
 A soldier causes woe, but seldom jeers it.
 Or know'st thou not—and sure 'twill pity thee!
 The gracious Countess, our kind lady—indeed
 I trust they will return—is strangely chang'd!

F L O R I A N.

By my good sword, thou shalt unriddle, priest.
 What means this tale? What mintage is at work
 To coin delusion, that this fair domain
 May become holy patrimony? Thus
 Teach you our matrons to defraud their issue
 By artificial fits and acted ravings?
 I have beheld your juggles, heard your dreams.
 Th' imposture shall be known. These sixteen years
 Has my friend Edmund pin'd in banishment:
 While masses, mumblings, goblins and processions
 Usurp'd his heritage, and made of Narbonne
 A theatre of holy interludes
 And sainted frauds. But day darts on your spells.
 Th' enlighten'd age eschews your vile deceits,
 And truth shall do mankind and Edmund justice.

B E N E D I C T.

Unhallow'd boy, I scorn thy contumely.
 In camps and trenches vent thy lewd reproaches,
 Blaspheming while ye tremble. Heav'n's true soldiers,
 Endu'd with more than mortal courage, defy
 Hosts numerous as the Pagan chivalry

Pour'd

Pour'd forth to crush the church's rising glories.
—But this is an enlighten'd age!—Behold
The triumphs of your sect! to yonder plains
Bend thy illumin'd eye! The Vaudois there,
Writhing in flames, and quiv'ring at th' approach
Of Rome's impending knife, attest the blessings
Conferr'd on their instructed ignorance!

FLORIAN.

Monstrous! unparallel'd! Are cries and groans
Of butcher'd conscientious men the hymns
With which you chant the victories of the church?
Do you afflict and laugh? stab and huzza?
—But I am dallying with my own impatience—
Where is this mother? I will tent her soul;
And warn thee, if I find suggestion's whisper
Has practic'd to the detriment of my friend,
Thy caitiff life shall answer to my sword,
Tho' shrin'd within the pillars of the Vatican.

BENEDICT.

Judge heaven betwixt us!
If e'er the dews of night shall fall, thou see'st not
The cup of wrath pour'd out, and triple woes
O'ertake unheard-of crimes; call me false prophet,
Renounce my gods and join thee to the impious!
Thou in thy turn, if truth lives on my lips,
Tremble! repent!—behold! the hour approaches!

76 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

S C E N E IV.

COUNTESS, FLORIAN, BENEDICT,
PORTER.

COUNTESS.

I dare not shoot the gulf—ha! Benedict!
Thou art a priest, thy mission should be holy,
If thou beliest not heav'n—quick, do thy work!
If there is pow'r in pray'r, teach me some sounds
To charm my senses, lest my coward flesh
Recoil, and win the mastery o'er my will.
—'Tis not the wound; it is the consequence!
See! see! my Narbonne stands upon the brink,
And snatches from the readiest fury there
A blazing torch! he whirls it round my head,
And asks where are my children!

PORTER.

Split, my heart,

At this sad sight!

FLORIAN.

Stand off! thou'rt an accomplice—
Madam, it was your morning's gracious pleasure
I should attend you. May I hope your pardon,
If I anticipate—

COUNTESS.

Ha! Who art thou?

FLORIAN.

Have you forgot me, lady?

COUNTESS.

Memory

Is full. A head distract as mine can hold
Two only objects, guilt and eternity!

FLORIAN,

A TRAGEDY.

77

FLORIAN.

No more of this. Time has abundant hours
For holy meditation. Nor have years
Trac'd such deep admonition on your cheek,
As call for sudden preparation—

COUNTESS.

[Wildly.

Prayer

Can do no more: its efficacy lost—
What must be, must be soon—He will return.

FLORIAN.

He is return'd, your son—have you not seen him?

COUNTESS.

Would I had never!

FLORIAN.

Come, this is too much.

This villainous monk has step'd 'twixt you and nature;
And misreported of the noblest gentleman
That treads on christian ground—Are you a mother?
Are legends dearer to you than your son?
Think you 'tis piety to gorge these miscreants,
And drive your child from your embrace—

COUNTESS.

Ye saints!

This was the dæmon prompted it—avaunt!
He beckons me—I will not—lies my lord
Not bleeding in the porch? I'll tear my hair
And bathe his wounds—Where's Beatrice!—monster!
monster!

She leads the dæmon—see! they spread the couch!
No, I will perish with my Narbonne—Oh!
My strength, my reason faint—darkness surrounds me!
To-morrow!—never will to-morrow come!
Let me die here!

[Sinks on a bench.

FLORIAN.

78 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

FLORIAN.

This is too much for art.

Chill damps sit on her brow : her pulse replies not :

BENEDICT.

No ; 'tis fictitious all—'twas I inspir'd

The horrors she has been so kind to utter

At my suggestion.

FLORIAN.

That insulting sneer

Speaks more the devil than if thy words were serious.

Be her distraction counterfeit or real,

Her sex demands compassion or assistance.

But she revives !

COUNTESS.

Is death then past ! my brain

Beats not its wonted tempest—in the grave

There is peace then !

FLORIAN.

Her agony abates.

Look up and view your friends.

COUNTESS.

Alas ! I fear me,

This is life still !—am I not in my castle ?

Sure I should know this garden—good old Peter !

My honest servant, thou I see wilt never

Quit thy poor mistress !—kind old man, he weeps !

PORTER.

Indeed it is for joy—how fares my lady ?

COUNTESS.

Exhausted, Peter, that I have not strength

To be distracted—hah ! your looks betray

Tremendous innuendoes !—gracious heaven !

Have I said ought—has wildness—trust me, sirs,

In

A TRAGEDY.

79

In these sad fits my unhing'd fancy wanders
Beyond the compass of things possible.
Sometimes an angel of excelling brightness
I seem to whirl the orbs and launch the comet.
Then hideous wings with forked points array me,
And I suggest strange crimes to shuddering matrons—
Sick fancy must be pardon'd.

BENEDICT.

(Artful woman! [*Aside.*

Thou subtle emblem of thy sex, compos'd
Of madness and deceit—but since thy brain
Has lost its poize, I will send those shall shake it
Beyond recovery of its reeling bias.) [*Exit.*

[*COUNTESS makes a sign to PETER to retire.*

S C E N E V.

COUNTESS, FLORIAN.

COUNTESS.

This interval is well—'tis thy last boon,
Tremendous Providence! and I will use it
As 'twere th' elixir of descending mercy:
Not a drop shall be waste—accept my thanks!
Preserve my reason! and preserve my child!
—Stranger, thy years are green; perhaps may mock
A woman's words, a mother's woe!—but honour,
If I believe this garb, is thy profession.
Hast thou not dealt in blood?—then thou hast heard
The dying groan, and sin's despairing accent.
Struck it not on thy soul! Recall it, sir!
What then was thy sensation, feel for me!

FLORIAN.

80 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

FLORIAN.

I shudder! listen, pity, and respect thee!

COUNTESS.

Resolve my anxious heart. Tho' vagrant pleasure,
Th' ebriety of youth, and worse than passion,
Example, lead thee to the strumpet vice;
Say, if beneath the waves of dissipation,
The germ of virtue blossoms in thy soul.

FLORIAN.

A soldier's honour is his virtue. Gownmen
Wear it for show, and barter it for gold,
And have it still. A soldier and his honour
Exist together, and together perish.

COUNTESS.

I do believe thee. Thus my Narbonne thought.
Then hear me, child of honour! Canst thou cherish
Unblemish'd innocence! wilt thou protect it?
Wilt thou observe its wand'rings? call it back,
Confine it to the path that leads to happiness?
Hast thou that genuine heroism of soul
To hug the little fondling sufferer,
When nestling in thy bosom, drown'd in blushes,
Nor cast her from thee, while a grinning world
Reviles her with a mother's foul misdeeds?

FLORIAN.

My arm is sworn to innocence distressed;
Point out the lovely mourner.

COUNTESS.

'Tis enough.

Nor suffer th' ebbing moments more enquiry.
My orphan shall be thine—nay, start not, sir,
Your loves are known to me. Wealth past th' ambition
Of Gallia's proudest baron shall endow her.

Within

A TRAGEDY. 21

Within this casket is a monarch's ransom,
Ten thousand ducats more are lodg'd within,
All this is thine with Adeliza's hand.

FLORIAN.

[With Adeliza!

COUNTESS.

Ha! dost thou recoil?

Dost thou not love her?

FLORIAN.

I love Adeliza!

Lady, recall thy wand'ring memory.

COUNTESS.

Dost thou reject her? and has hope beguil'd thee
In this sad only moment? Hast thou dar'd

With ruffian insolence gaze on her sweetness,

And mark it for an hour of wanton dalliance?

Oh! I will guard my child, tho' gaping dæmons

Howl with impatience!

FLORIAN.

Most rever'd of matrons,

Tho' youth and rosy joy flush on my cheek,

Tho' the licentious camp and rapine's holiday

Have been my school; deem not so reprobate

My morals, that my eye would note no distance

Between the harlot's glance and my friend's bride.

COUNTESS.

Thy friend! what friend?

FLORIAN.

Lord Edmund—

COUNTESS.

What of him?

FLORIAN.

Is Adeliza's lord; her wedded bridegroom.

G COUNTESS.

12 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

COUNTESS.

Confusion! phrenzy! blast me, all ye furies!
Edmund and Adeliza! when! where! how!
Edmund wed Adeliza! quick, unsay
The monstrous tale—oh! prodigy of ruin!
Does my own son then boil with fiercer fires
Than scorch'd his impious mother's madding veins!
Did reason reassume its shatter'd throne,
But as spectatrefs of this last of horrors?
Oh! let my dagger drink my heart's black blood,
And then present my hell-born progeny
With drops of kindred sin!—*that* were a torch
Fit to light up such loves! and fit to quench them!

FLORIAN.

What means this agony? didst thou not grant
The maiden to his wishes?

COUNTESS.

Did I not couple

Distinctions horrible! plan unnatural rites
To grace my funeral pile, and meet the furies
More innocent than those I leave behind me!

FLORIAN.

Amazement!—I will hasten—grant, ye pow'rs!
My speed be not too late! *[Exit.]*

COUNTESS.

Globe of the world,
If thy frame split not with such crimes as these,
It is immortal!

SCENE

S C E N E VI.

COUNTESS, EDMUND, ADELIZA.

[EDMUND and ADELIZA enter at the opposite door
from which FLORIAN went out. They kneel to
the COUNTESS.

EDMUND.

Dear parent, look on us, and bless your children !

COUNTESS.

My children ! horror ! horror ! yes, too sure
Ye are my children !—Edmund, loose that hand ;
'Tis poison to thy soul !—hell has no venom
Like a child's touch !—oh ! agonizing thought !
—Who made this marriage ? whose unhallow'd breath
Pronounc'd the incestuous sounds ?

EDMUND.

Incest ! good heavens !

COUNTESS.

Yes, thou devoted victim ! let thy blood
Curdle to stone ! perdition circumvents thee !
Lo ! where this monster stands ! thy mother ! mistress !
The mother of thy daughter, sister, wife !
The pillar of accumulated horrors !
Hear ! tremble !—and then marry, if thou darest !

EDMUND.

Yes, I do tremble, tho' thy words are phrenzy.
So black must be the passions that inspir'd it,
I shudder for thee ! pitying duty shudders !

COUNTESS.

For me !—O Edmund, I have burst the bond
Of every tie—when thou shalt know the crimes,

84 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

In which this fury did involve thy youth,
It will seem piety to curse me, Edmund!
Oh! impious night!—hah! is not that my lord?
He shakes the curtains of the nuptial couch, [*Wildly*,
And starts to find a son there!

EDMUND.

Gracious heaven!

Grant that these shocking images be raving!

ADELIZA.

Sweet lady, be compos'd—indeed I thought
This marriage was thy will---but we will break it---
Benedict shall discharge us from our vows,

COUNTESS.

Thou gentle lamb, from a fell tyger sprung,
Unknowing half the miseries that await thee!
—Oh! they are innocent—Almighty pow'r!—

[*Kneels, but rises again hastily.*

Ha! dare I pray! for others intercede!
I pray for them, the cause of all their woe!
—But for a moment give me leave, despair!
For a short interval lend me that reason,
Thou gavest, heav'n, in vain!—it must be known
The fullness of my crime; or innocent these
May plunge them in new horrors, Not a word
Can 'scape me, but will do the work of thunder,
And blast those moments I regain from madness!

Ye know how fondly my luxurious fancy
Doated upon my lord. For eighteen months
An embassy detain'd him from my bed.
A harbinger announc'd his near return.
Love dress'd his image to my longing thoughts
In all its warmest colours—but the morn,
In which impatience grew almost to sickness,

Presented

Presented him a bloody corse before me.
 I rav'd—the storm of disappointed passions
 Assail'd my reason, fever'd all my blood—
 Whether too warmly press'd, or too officious
 To turn the torrent of my grief aside,
 A damsel, that attended me, disclos'd
 Thy suit, unhappy boy!

EDMUND.

What is to come!

Shield me, ye gracious pow'rs, from my own thoughts!
 My dreadful apprehension!

COUNTESS.

Give it scope!

Thou canst not harbour a foreboding thought
 More dire, than I conceiv'd, I executed.
 Guilt rush'd into my soul—my fancy saw thee
 Thy father's image—

EDMUND.

Swallow th' accursed sound!

Nor dare to say—

COUNTESS.

Yes, thou polluted son!

Grief, disappointment, opportunity,
 Rais'd such a tumult in my madding blood,
 I took the damsel's place; and while thy arms
 Twin'd, to thy thinking, round another's waist,
 Hear, hell, and tremble!—thou didst clasp thy mother!

EDMUND.

Oh! execrable!

[ADELIZA faints.

COUNTESS.

Be that swoon eternal!

Nor let her know the rest—she is thy daughter,
 Fruit of that monstrous night!

EDMUND.

86 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

EDMUND.

Infernal woman!

[Draws his dagger.]

My dagger must repay a tale like this!

Blood so distemper'd—no—I must not strike—

I dare not punish what you dar'd commit.

COUNTESS. *[Seizing his dagger.]*

Give me the steel—my arm will not recoil.

Thus, Edmund, I revenge thee! *[Stabs herself.]*

EDMUND.

Help! ho! help!

For both I tremble, dare not succour either!

COUNTESS.

Peace! and conceal our shame—quick, frame some legend—

They come!

S C E N E VII.

COUNTESS, EDMUND, ADELIZA,
FLORIAN, BENEDICT, Attendants.

COUNTESS.

Assist the maid—an accident—

[They bear off ADELIZA.]

By my own hand—ha! Benedict!—but no!

I must not turn accuser.

BENEDICT.

Mercy, heaven!

Who did this deed?

COUNTESS.

Myself.

BENEDICT.

What was the cause?

COUNTESS.

A TRAGEDY.

87

COUNTESS.

Follow me to yon gulph, and thou wilt know.
I answer not to man.

BENEDICT.

Bethink thee, lady—

COUNTESS.

Thought ebbs apace—O Edmund, could a blessing
Part from my lips, and not become a curse,
I would—poor Adeliza—'tis accomplish'd! [Dies.

BENEDICT.

My lord, explain these horrors. Wherefore fell
Your mother? and why faints your wife?

EDMUND.

My wife!

Thou damning priest! I have no wife—thou know'st it—
Thou gavest me indeed—no—rot my tongue
E'er the dread sound escape it!—bear away
That hateful monk—

BENEDICT.

[As he goes out to FLORIAN.

Who was the prophet now?

Remember me!

EDMUND.

O Florian, we must haste
To where fell war assumes its ugliest form:
I burn to rush on death!

FLORIAN.

I dare not ask;
But stiffen'd with amazement I deplore—

EDMUND.

O tender friend! I must not violate
Thy guiltless ear!—ha! 'tis my father calls! [Wildly.
I dare not see him!

88 THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

FLORIAN.

Be compos'd, my lord,

We are all your friends—

EDMUND.

Have I no kindred here?

They will confound all friendship! interweave

Such monstrous union—

FLORIAN.

Good my lord, resume

Your wonted reason. Let us in and comfort

Your gentle bride—

EDMUND.

Forbid it, all ye pow'rs!

O Florian, bear her to the holy sisters.

Say, 'twas my mother's will she take the veil,

I never must behold her!—never more

Review this theatre of monstrous guilt!

No; to th' embattled foe I will present

This hated form—and welcome be the sabre

That leaves no atom of it undefac'd!

F I N I S.

